

POLISH PARADOX: SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF POLISH CATHOLIC IDENTITY

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Abstract

Polish society has long been shaped by Catholic values—a legacy that reaches back to the country’s conversion to Catholicism shortly after its formation in the 10th century. Over time, Catholicism became woven into everyday life so deeply that it came to define not only Poland’s moral world but also its sense of cultural belonging. This religious identity also offered Poland a symbolic anchor in its effort to see itself as part of the West in the long-standing tension between “East” and “West” in Europe. Yet Poland’s path to modernity did not unfold the way it did in Western Europe. This uneven process allowed the country to hold onto its cultural ties with the West while also drifting away from them, producing a complicated relationship with modern change. At the center of this tension lies a persistent problem: the Polish state has historically struggled to consolidate strong political authority, and Catholicism—despite its powerful social presence—has not been able to fully resolve political conflicts on its own. This mixture of weak statehood and strong religious identity forms what is often described as the “paradox of Poland.”

Keywords: Poland, Paradox, Catholicism, Religion, Society.

1. Introduction

Poland has lost its political presence multiple times throughout history. Despite this, it has maintained its social and cultural presence. Poland’s continued social and cultural presence is closely linked to the deep roots of the Catholic faith in Poland. For in Poland, Catholicism, through its role as a soft ideology, has protected society from disintegration in overcoming every political crisis. In Poland, despite maintaining its social presence, Catholicism alone is insufficient to prevent a similar crisis when a new one arises. This situation is the most concise expression of the “Polish paradox.” This paradox, a historical phenomenon, becomes even more significant when one considers that Poland’s modernization remained on the brink and the delay in the establishment of a modern state.

Polish society must grapple with a historical and sociological paradox stemming from modernization and its cultural position between civilizational zones. This paradox is intricately linked to social disruptions and feeds on the fluctuations of social development. Poland, whose foundations were laid in the 10th century, has historically experienced a conversion to Catholic Christianity, three waves of political division in 1772, 1793, and 1795, the Polish Enlightenment, the impact of World Wars I and II with varying outcomes, the functioning of the socialist system, and its collapse (Watt, 1979). The premises and outcomes of Poland’s experience are replete with important historical and sociological facts that are directly interconnected.

Montesquieu (1877: 417) offers a beautiful example of the importance of root causes when considering feudal laws: “A mighty oak has its head raised toward the sky. From afar, one sees only its leaves. Up close, one sees its trunk, but not its roots. To discover the roots, one must dig at the base of the oak.” Based on this analogy Montesquieu established, history must be understood as a process in which contradictory and chaotic actions are interconnected into a coherent whole. Outcomes pertaining to social life can be explained by discussing powerful causes on solid grounds. Therefore, social grounds and backgrounds are undeniably important

for sociological inference. Poland has had to fight for freedom more than once throughout history. One of the social actors with the greatest organizing power in these struggles was the Polish Catholic Church, the institutional extension of the Catholic faith, considered an integral part of Polish identity.

Society is the product of a balance between various elements. The position of Catholicism in Poland places it in a special place in understanding social contradictions and consistencies. Social structures are forms of human relations that exhibit certain regularities. Catholicism, in Poland, is an institutionalized structure that shapes the people's worldview and directs political and economic behavior. To put it another way, Catholicism has formed a hard shell around Polish society, a shell that has not yet been broken. Through its relationships with society, religion, and politics, it plays a key role in understanding social problems in Poland.

2. Theoretic Background of Polish Paradox

Poland is part of the Eastern European dilemma that emerged historically. The West and the East hold distinct prejudices about Poland. However, the duty of social scientists is to strive to purify these prejudices. Therefore, for us, Poles are neither innocent victims in a historical and sociological context, nor should they be approached through a concept proposed by Edward Said, “a sense of innocence stemming from victimhood” (1994: xii). It is important to avoid relying on single-factor explanations for the phenomenon of Catholicism in Poland. The fundamental problems affecting Polish society should be addressed from a broad perspective, focusing on the experience of modernization and its being caught between civilizational zones. Poland, due to its geographical location, is considered one of Europe’s crossroads. Therefore, Poland’s geographical position has played a central role in the transformation of the Polish state and the formation of Polish identity. Since its founding, Poland has attracted the attention of neighboring states due to its geographical location and human resources. One of the fundamental reasons for Poland’s social crises stems from its political and cultural relations with its neighbors. Located in a transitional position between East and West, Poland, like some other states throughout history, has been seen as a bridge between Western and Eastern civilizations.

The metaphor of being a bridge between civilizations is not unique to Poland. Other Eastern European societies share the same fate as the Poles in this regard. These societies are neither Western nor Eastern politically or culturally. Therefore, their permeable and tense situation makes it extremely difficult for these societies to establish political and cultural positions. Despite experiencing numerous political losses throughout history, Poland has maintained its national unity through the unifying power of Catholicism, which maintains its social structure. Therefore, Catholicism holds special significance for Poland, compared to other countries, as a distinctive difference. Certain structures influence societies more profoundly than others. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the relationship between social action and religion in Poland. The organizing power of Catholicism in Poland gains significance within the historical context of modernization and the tension created by the East-West conflict. Therefore, the fundamental question that must be asked to understand Poland’s social reality must be asked in terms of what the East and the West refer to.

This issue, which encompasses historical, political, and cultural phenomena beyond geography, is of paramount importance. Todorova views “East” as a relational term and argues that its meaning changes depending on the location. For a German, a Pole is Eastern, while for a Polish, a Russian is Eastern. However, the East cannot be explained simply by geographical location and is closely related to the problem of modernization. The fundamental principle in positioning is related to where the positioning perspective is located within the theoretical framework (Todorova, 2015: 125). The East acquires meaning according to the attributed values and the

ideological position of the observer. The fundamental problem is the civilizational divergence between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the narrow sense, and Christianity and Islam in the broader sense.

Todorova, in establishing the East-West distinction, draws on Goffman's inference that the stigmatized position themselves in relation to the stigmatizer. The stigmatized tend to position themselves according to the degree of their stigma. The stigmatized may adopt the attitude of the stigmatizer toward those who are more severely stigmatized. Any relationship the stigmatized establishes with those who are more severely stigmatized influences the stigmatized's identity-building process (Goffman, 1963: 107). When a Polish Catholic Slav is stigmatized as Eastern, they project a similar stigmatizing process onto a Russian Orthodox Slav. Thus, by becoming Catholic, they position themselves in the West relative to the East.

The East-West divide established historically is accepted as the West's superiority over the East. "From a Western perspective, the necessary solution for Eastern societies lies in the West. However, there are irreparable differences between East and West. The East lacks the means and resources to resolve these differences" (Coşkun, 1989: 292). All societies encompassed by the bridge metaphor share a similar positioning from a Western perspective. Poland, too, has developed a reaction to see itself as distinct from the East, a profound paradox that requires careful study.

To understand Poland's desire to break away from the East and become part of the West, it is necessary to ground Poland in its history and its relationship with the Catholic faith, its defining difference. Catholicism is a significant element in Poland, a reference to tradition. Therefore, it has evolved into an impenetrable institution, filling value gaps and transforming social and political behavior into dimensions.

The social continuities and ruptures that sociology analyzes are, in essence, historical problems. In this context, it is essential to embrace the holistic understanding of history established by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929 through the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. When investigating the causes of historical change, the fundamental tenet of this school is to consider all the factors that influence these changes. Furthermore, the mutual utilization of different disciplines within the social sciences is a characteristic of this school. In this context, it is important to acknowledge the framework outlined by Fernand Braudel, a representative of the *Annales* School, for considering history in conjunction with other disciplines. Within this framework, an attitude must be taken against the individual-focused understanding of history and an approach that transcends the individual and encompasses the social. Social scientists should be more concerned with how history shapes and directs people and societies than with how people make history. Social realities must be approached for their own sake (Braudel, 2016: 31, 33). Our effort to understand the social continuities of Catholicism in Poland requires, precisely at this point, the recognition that the issue of continuity present in sociology is a historical one.

Historical narratives conducted through the individual are event-based. However, a sociological perspective compels us to engage with social phenomena. Durkheim argues that social phenomena are unique entities, independent of individual formations. Everything within a society's sphere of influence can be considered a social phenomenon (2012: 37). Encountering social phenomena within historical narrative is inevitable. Therefore, the unity of history and sociology is instructive in a sociological study based on continuity. Mills (1959: 145) makes the same point when he argues that historical material must be used comprehensively in every study of society.

Skocpol similarly argues that sociology is an endeavor rooted and oriented toward history. He states that true sociological studies have certain characteristic features. Primarily, sociology is concerned with social structures and processes that establish themselves in time and space. It is necessary to consider the temporal sequence of these structures and processes. The social and

cultural differentiations that emerge throughout history are among the primary areas that sociology should focus on (Skocpol, 2014: 1-2). The political and cultural relations established with Catholicism in Poland are the building blocks that form the social phenomena shaped by history. Therefore, analyzing Poland's social phenomena through sociology's closeness to history is an important key to unlocking the paradox.

The main factor we consider in constructing historicity is the historical reflections of changes occurring at the social level. These ruptures and continuities, along with the social changes experienced in Poland, shed light on institutions that had been preserved unchanged, such as Catholicism. Each time Poland entered a period of disintegration, it resorted to the organizing power of Catholicism to overcome this process. Catholicism, in a sense, secured a solid position as Poland's safety net. However, Catholicism's safety net could not prevent Poland from losing its independence again and again. This demonstrates that the events in Poland repeated themselves monotonously, in a vicious cycle. This study will develop a discussion using the term "Polish paradox" to explain this paradoxical situation Poland finds itself in.

The reasons that paved the way for the Polish paradox are crystallized in Poland's being caught between Western and Eastern civilizations, and its constant recourse to religious institutions to overcome political and social ruptures, unable to fully modernize. Catholicism is the most powerful social actor directing social action in Poland and has developed an ideological function that enables Poles to react to social developments through religion.

Religion is a social phenomenon, and this opens the door to ideological explanations. Ideologies are maps that serve to guide people (Geertz, 1964: 61). Accepting religion as an ideology leads us to ask what kind of ideology it is. To clarify the distinction between ideologies, Mardin's distinction between hard ideology and soft ideology should be considered. According to Mardin, structures confined to elite culture, based on theoretical works, and systematically cultivated are called "hard ideologies." In contrast, "soft ideologies," unlike hard ideologies, are the amorphous belief systems of the masses. However, to better understand ideologies, it is necessary to consider attitudes. Attitudes should be considered as process organizations derived from behavior. Attitudes, like ideologies, are formative internal structures and provide us with a framework for understanding social events. However, there is also the fact that positions, compared to ideologies, cannot be fully established and are more ambiguous. The internal structures that take shape most in this context stand out as hard ideologies. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, are soft ideologies that take shape less (Mardin, 2016: 14-16). As a soft ideology, Catholicism's role in Poland as a key to social dilemmas is closely related to its ability to facilitate position-taking by developing a belief system. The role religion plays in alleviating social anxieties and overcoming social disruptions is the primary reason it is considered a soft ideology. This is because religion functions to facilitate position-taking in making sense of the world.

3. Historically Polish Paradox

During periods when Poland lost its political presence, Catholic Christianity was the linchpin that prevented the disintegration of Polish identity and ensured the continuity of society. Although Catholicism played a significant role in achieving political unity in Poland, it could not, on its own, prevent further political disintegration. The vicious cycle created by this situation will be defined as the "Polish paradox," as discussed above. This monotonous cycle, recurring throughout history, is inherent in Poland's modernization problem and its cultural and political position between civilizations.

One of the root causes of this paradox, perhaps the most important, can be explained by the relationship between religion and society. Geertz defines religion as "a system of symbols that is long-lasting, comprehensive, and powerful, and that seeks to instill motivations in people"

(1966: 4-5). Based on this definition, it is possible to say that religion is a sub-branch of cultural systems. This sub-position of religion can be examined from a multifaceted perspective, serving diverse social functions. The first function of religion is personal and is a cognitive system that attempts to make sense of issues that individuals find difficult to explain. The second function of religion is cultural and develops conceptual perspectives for interpreting the world. The third function of religion serves to preserve and ensure the continuity of social structure (Mardin, 2014: 62-63). Within the scope of this study, it is the second and, especially, the third function of religion that is important to us. To establish a solid foundation for the formation of the Polish paradox, an approach must be developed based on these two functions of religion, specifically Catholicism. Therefore, understanding the position of Catholicism in Polish history is essential for sociological analysis.

Braudel, while explaining the political situation of Europe, emphasizes spatial divisions as follows: "Special freedoms have dominated the destiny of Europe from one end to the other, creating privileges specific to certain groups, some broad, some narrow. These freedoms often contradict and even exclude each other" (2014: 349). Catholicism and Orthodoxy have a conflicting positioning relationship based on opposition and mutual exclusion. Poland's geographical location, which facilitates intersocietal interaction, has allowed both civilizational zones to exert a permeable influence on Polish territory. Thus, Poland's location in a transitional zone between civilizations necessitated a choice between the contrasting civilizational zones Braudel describes. The construction of Polish culture through Catholicism is also influenced by these material and spatial factors.

While seeking a place in the European political landscape, Poland encountered Catholicism, and Poland's conversion to Catholicism occurred through an alliance with the Czech state. The Christianization efforts launched eastward by the Germans, a significant power in the West Slavic lands in the 10th century, posed a threat to the Poles of German domination. The Poles, wary of entering the German sphere of influence, converted to Catholicism through an alliance with the Czechs, a political move aimed at securing Poles' independence from the Germans (Kołodzowski, 2000: 10-14). The fact that this conversion to Christianity occurred through Catholicism demonstrates that Poland, rather than entering a position opposed to German influence, preferred to integrate into European political relations and built its Catholic culture as a result of these relations.

Understanding Poland's construction of Catholic culture and its subsequent preservation to the present necessitates asking what culture is. Culture is the examination of the meaningfulness and consistency of the tools passed down between generations that ensure the preservation of the social structure. Two elements serve to preserve culture: cultural meanings and the symbols that carry these meanings. In other words, culture is the shared formation of symbols (Mardin, 2014: 51-52). The fact that Catholicism is a cultural phenomenon in Poland paves the way for discussions of the continuity of its social structure. Poland's orientation towards the region of Catholic civilization brings with it the fact that its culture has developed within the boundaries of this region. As a result, the material and spiritual symbols of Catholicism, such as unquestioning respect for church authority, the elimination of divorce in marriage terms, and the prominent presence of icons of Jesus and the saints under every roof, have become deeply rooted in Polish life.

Because symbols carry cultural meanings, they ensure understanding and integration within society. Thus, they pave the way for the establishment of the social system. However, it is necessary to emphasize a crucial point here. It is necessary to note a subtle distinction between culture and the social system. Culture is an organized system of symbols and meanings that influence social relations. These symbols and values enable the definition of the social environment and the expression of social feelings. The social system, on the other hand, is the specific characteristics of social relations and, therefore, is related to the process of interaction.

While culture is the meaning that illuminates individuals' lives, social structure is the network of social relations (Geertz, 1961: 137). Poland entered the sphere of Catholic influence and moved away from the sphere of Orthodox influence. As a direct result, values and symbols in Poland began to be shaped by Catholicism. At the same time, with the conversion to Catholicism, the network of social relations in Poland entered a new path with Catholic culture. The dichotomy between Catholicism and Orthodoxy is the religious and cultural reflection of the political and ideological conflict between Rome and Constantinople. Catholicism, in a sense, takes a cultural and political position against Orthodoxy through religion. Such positioning relationships create characteristics that distinguish societies from other societies, and religion plays a major role in this. Religions are tools through which societies define and promote themselves, enabling them to establish their position (Sezer, 2011: 20). Poland, in the political and cultural environment of the period, turned to Catholicism and came under the protection of the Papacy immediately after its founding (Arık, 2010: 27). As a result, it aimed to find a place within Western relations and to construct a social identity that articulated Polish identity and Catholicism. This quest coincides with the East-West dichotomy, one of Poland's most fundamental social issues since its founding. The historical, political, and social implications of this East-West dichotomy are outlined below.

Poland experienced its first loss of central political authority shortly after converting to Catholicism, and the course of Catholicism had to be shaped by this loss of authority. In the early period, church-community networks operated through economically based town networks (Bielak, 2011). If we consider the issue from Weber's perspective, the closeness of early church-community networks to economically based town networks becomes significant. According to Weber, religious action should not be considered separately from everyday actions due to its economic consequences (2016: 81). The relationship between Poland's early communities and economically based town networks gains significance with this approach. In this respect, it is possible to infer that the course of Catholicism in Poland progressed through mutually beneficial economic relations. Because the lack of central authority brought church congregations closer to regional powers, and during the feudal period in Poland, which lasted until the second half of the 13th century, church congregations survived through their direct relationships with the nobility (Klima, 2017: 269). The turn of church congregations to the nobility in the absence of central authority was a direct result of economic and political relations. While the nobility needed Catholic organizations to enhance their legitimacy, churches needed the nobility for the economic foundations that ensured their continuity.

If we look at feudal examples in Europe, we see that pre-modern cities began to form within the feudal order within which they grew. Separated regions governed themselves politically, economically, and legally within the context of freedom. What is called complete freedom is actually a consequence of economic prosperity (Braudel, 2014: 361-362). This situation also applies to Poland. The free exchange of power between the divided regions within Poland, the use of different currencies, and the unruliness of merchants led to interregional social and political conflicts. Politically fragmented church communities and all bishoprics in Poland united through religion to take action against the division. In response to Poland's need for religious, economic, and political unification, the steps taken to restore central authority came from the Polish Catholic Church. Religion, which we consider a soft ideology, began to function as a tool to counteract destruction. The Gniezno Archbishopric, the religious center to which church congregations and bishoprics were affiliated, protected Poland from the political expansionist influence of the German clergy during the feudal period. The expansionist policies of the German clergy paved the way for the Polish clergy to strengthen their foundations to resist this expansion. The use of the Polish language, in particular, shaped the national consciousness of the Poles (Arık, 2010: 54-58). National consciousness in Poland is intertwined with religious symbols. Catholicism, as an organized social actor, united the Polish people and,

for the first time in the 13th century, saved Poland from disintegration and set it on the path to unification. The emergence of the Polish paradox began precisely with these developments, and this paradox has remained cyclically alive throughout history.

The second half of the 14th century was a period when Poland, on the path to unification, established close relations with Lithuania. The transition of Polish rule from the Piast dynasty to the Jagiellonian dynasty not only united Polish and Lithuanian societies but also paved the way for Lithuania's conversion to Catholicism. This development laid the foundation for a union between Poland and Lithuania that would last approximately 400 years. During this century, bishoprics were established in Vilnius and Lviv, expanding the Polish Catholic Church's sphere of influence eastward. Church congregational networks became stable, and a church organization was established (Klima, 2017: 269). Under the influence of Catholicism, Polish society developed a national consciousness through the social collective, building solidarity networks with the unifying power of church-communal networks.

The social collective is a concept that gives meaning to the unity of people through the collective consciousness embodied by Émile Durkheim. Religion is one of the most fundamental institutions that ensure the social collective. In explaining the division of social labor, Durkheim discusses two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is a form of solidarity dominated by collective emotions and beliefs. In this solidarity, individual consciousness is rarely observed, while the social and the religious are united (2014: 99-141). The establishment of church-community networks in Poland is a result of the social collective based on mechanical solidarity. In defining religion, Durkheim considers religion as a shared entity through the union of religious participants in a spiritual community called a temple (2010: 76). Drawing on Durkheim, it is observed that the Polish people maintained their unity through the Polish Catholic Church, based in Gniezno, and constructed an identity, along with Polish identity, through the Catholic faith. In the historical process, as the Polish Catholic Church became more deeply rooted in the social base, the social collective established by the Polish people became stronger.

Poland's 15th century politics was not solely based on gaining religious power. Dominating Prussia was a component of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's policy of gaining control of the commercial region stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. With this development, religion, in a sense, strengthened its function as an ideological tool for shaping economic and political relations. The 16th century was the golden age of Polish political and economic history. Controlling trade relations from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, Poland was a powerful actor in European political affairs (Davis Jr., 1992: 134). The increasing active role played in the Baltic Sea brought Poland economic prosperity. Poland's geographically flat country and its arable lands ensured the supply of goods for trade. Furthermore, economic developments began to make a presence felt in Poland of Renaissance humanism (Yüce, 2004: 24-33). Despite all these positive developments, resources and income were not shared equally among all segments of society. The 16th century also fundamentally influenced future developments in Poland due to the inequality in income distribution. During its reign, the Jagiellonian dynasty granted numerous privileges to the nobility. While these privileges strengthened the nobility politically, they inversely weakened central authority.

A look at Western Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries reveals that feudal relations of production were unable to address the dilemmas facing Western Europe. The reaction to these dilemmas was the rupture in the medieval state and social structure caused by the establishment of absolute governments in France, England, and Spain in the 16th century (Anderson, 2013: 15). In Poland, however, the opposite was happening. A government approach similar to parliamentary monarchy prevailed under the name of a noble republic, which gained power against the central authority. While the nobility rapidly grew rich, artisans and small-scale merchants were driven into poverty. The peasants, too, suffered from acute poverty, reaching

the point of rebellion. The unequal distribution of resources, injustice in production relations, and the weakening of central authority would reach their peak in the following centuries and bring about social dilemmas.

The 16th century marked the beginning of the emergence of reformist ideas brought to Christianity by Martin Luther and John Calvin in Poland. Luther's ideas were more prominent in Wrocław and Gdańsk, while Calvin's ideas were heard in Kraków and Lithuania. However, even if tolerated to a certain extent, these Protestant tendencies were considered hostile to Catholicism and were not welcomed in Poland (Arik, 2010: 132-133). The rejection of Protestant criticism of Christianity inevitably strengthened the position of Catholicism in Poland. The resistance against Protestantism strengthened Catholic culture and society through traditional Catholic values. This commitment to Catholic values is a significant component of the Polish paradox. Poland adopted a position that adhered to its religious traditions while avoiding critical thought. This attitude also built a wall in front of Poland's modernization and paved the way for Poland's paradoxical cycle.

The 16th century also marked the end of the Jagiellonian dynasty and, as mentioned above, the beginning of the system of elective monarchy in Poland. The existence of elective monarchs in Poland demonstrates the decay of strong royal authority (Prazmowska, 2010: 80). The authority to conduct the election of monarchs rested with the religious leader, the Archbishop of Gniezno, and all nobles had the right to vote (Kucharski and Misiejuk, 2007: 87). The fact that all nobles had the right to vote was the result of concessions made to the nobility by the Jagiellonian monarchs. However, this situation demonstrates how far Poland was from being an absolute state compared to other European states. However, until elections were held, the Archbishop of Gniezno held the right to represent the Polish-Lithuanian State (Arik, 2010: 148). Despite the undeniable power of the nobility and the equality among them, the fact that the Archbishop of Gniezno was granted the right to represent the state demonstrates that the Catholic position in the Polish-Lithuanian State was considered the highest-ranking state representative. More specifically, the Church acted as a counterweight to the nobility. This balance had social consequences. The Church's stance against the nobility laid the foundations for the formation of a positive civil society in Poland (Putnam, 1995). With the disappearance of the state mechanism in Poland at the end of the 18th century, Catholic organization, through civil society, became the force that held society together and posed a reflex against the threat of assimilation. By the end of the 16th century, church reform was implemented at the institutional level in the Polish-Lithuanian State. First, the Orthodox churches in Lviv and Vilnius were united under a single roof. More importantly, the unification of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches was considered, and the "Church Union," which was affiliated with the Papacy and allowed freedom in Orthodox religious ceremonies, was adopted (Arik, 2010: 158). With the unification of the churches, an attempt was made to compensate for the political divisions within the Polish-Lithuanian State through religious unity. Despite the rise of the nobility in Poland and the subsequent turmoil in other segments of society, a unified religious structure emerged. However, this could not prevent Poland from entering political decline from the 17th century onward. The different political and cultural climate experienced by European states also paved the way for Poland's alienation from Western values. The 16th century was a period of Poland's rise, while at the same time, the foundations that paved the way for this paradox were strengthened. As a result of these developments, the Polish Catholic Church, once the only powerful authority in Poland, began to find itself isolated on a social and political level.

The 17th century marked the beginning of Poland's political decline, despite the rise of the Polish Catholic Church. During the war with the Swedes and Russians, known as the Deluge, and its aftermath, the Polish-Lithuanian State lost one-third of its population and began to lose the economic and political power it had gained in the 16th century. At the same time, the capital, Warsaw, a commercial center, was destroyed (Frost, 2013: 26-52). The fact that Warsaw

became vulnerable to attack demonstrates that the Deluge should be considered the beginning of the Poles' decline. These developments witnessed the strengthening of the Swedes, particularly in the Baltic Sea, and the Russians in the east, disrupting Polish trade and exacerbating related economic and social problems.

Another significant development in the 17th century was the Christian alliance formed against the Siege of Vienna by the Ottoman Empire. In the Siege of Vienna, Poles and Germans fought together for the first time in history against the Muslim Turks, who posed a threat to the Christian world (Stoye, 2006). The victory enhanced Polish Catholicism's prestige in the eyes of the Vatican. As a result, an attempt was made to compensate for the economic power lost to the Swedes and Russians with Vatican-backed religious power. As the Ottoman Empire and Islam lost ground, Christian Europe consolidated its power. However, the Ottoman Empire served as a balancing element and, in a sense, support for the Polish-Lithuanian State in European politics. This demonstrates how far Poland had drifted from the West and drawn closer to the East. The European states, strengthened by the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, turned their attention to the Polish-Lithuanian State. The primary reason for the political demise of the Polish-Lithuanian State at the end of the 18th century was the shift in European political, social, and economic balances in the 17th century.

By the 18th century, England and Russia, which held strategic commercial territories, were growing stronger. Other regional powers included France and Austria, both of whom held absolute power, and Prussia, whose power grew stronger as the Polish-Lithuanian Empire weakened. During this period, the Polish-Lithuanian Empire and the Ottoman Empire became targets for the new European powers.

The situation that led to the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian State was the result of developments in domestic and foreign politics. The "Eastern Question," proposed by Albert Sorel (1989), made the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian State objects to be partitioned by other states in the following century. England and France, due to their transatlantic colonial activities, did not participate in the partitioning of Poland. However, as Marx also noted, the Eastern Question gains meaning in the context of England and France's commercial relations and capitalism. Beyond the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Question is a deeper issue that England and France projected onto Russia, whom they perceived as a threat within their capitalist relations (2017). The "Eastern Question" within these relations also drew the Polish-Lithuanian State into its fold from another perspective. Austria, Prussia, and Russia, focusing on Eastern European politics, were the parties involved in the partitioning of Poland. These states were the new powers that governed politics in Eastern Europe with changing balances (Scott, 2001: 218-232). The process that led to the disintegration of the Polish-Lithuanian State was influenced by the weakening of central authority by the policies pursued by the princely republic and, consequently, Russia's direct involvement in the internal politics of the Polish-Lithuanian State.

Among the nobility that governed Polish politics in the 18th century, a system called the "liberum veto" existed, allowing a single nobleman's veto to overrule a decision. Instead of unanimity, the liberum veto allowed the nobleman who advocated the veto to exert negative influence over other nobles, the people, and the monarch. By exercising the veto, the nobleman effectively locked down politics and sought to create greater freedom for himself.

There is a fundamental concept that explains the liberal veto. Gottfried Lengnich defines this concept as "oppositional power," while Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz defines it as "negative power". Whether we accept the term "oppositional power" or "negative power," by the 18th century the state apparatus of the Polish-Lithuanian State was gridlocked by the liberal veto. This situation led to Russia becoming a guiding actor in the Polish-Lithuanian State's gubernatorial elections. With this gridlock in the state apparatus, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, in a sense, became Poland's protectors (Lukowski, 1999: 28). As a result, the Polish-Lithuanian

State was partitioned and politically erased from the map of Europe at the end of the 18th century due to the destruction of its economic and political power due to noble conflict. Although Poland was politically erased from the map, Polish society continued to exist culturally. From an East-West perspective, Poles chose Catholicism, establishing an allegiance to Western values. It was the national identity they built through Catholicism that saved Poles from assimilation. The loss of political independence led Poland to develop social reflexes. During the period of their independence, Poles viewed Catholicism as a stronghold, maintaining their belief in their part of Western civilization (Demir, 2015: 116). However, due to the value shifts that began with modernization during this period, Poles were not accepted as Westerners by Westerners. In the vortex of this stigmatizing politics, Poles who could not integrate with Eastern values were seen as an unwelcome problem between two opposing cultures (Garnett, 1996). The issues that make Poles special and place them in a sociologically specific position flourish here. Stuck between the East and the West, Poland was unable to establish a relationship of belonging to either side and was forced to live as a stateless (unwanted) nation, with a reaction that moved away from the ideal of Europeanization and nationalized Catholic values. Poland's desire for Europeanization and the problems it created continue to influence contemporary developments. Europeanization has different meanings for both East and West. From a Western perspective, Europeanization signifies integration or adaptation with the West, while from an Eastern perspective, it signifies modernization (Borzel and Thomas, 2003). Poland was stigmatized by the West as being pushed to the East, while the East stigmatized it for not being Orthodox. This dual stigmatization of Poland is the essence of the Polish paradox. Unable to integrate with either side, Poland reflexively positioned itself historically on Catholic and Polish values as the only way out. All these developments in Poland's early history dragged Poland into a paradoxical vortex, ideologically convincing the Polish people that the only way out was through political and cultural movements guided by Catholicism. The Polish paradox emerged within the historical context, as briefly summarized above. The connections Poland has established, or rather, has struggled to establish, with modernization will further solidify the Polish paradox. The reference to Catholicism in the post-1945 social movements, the main subject of this study, should be considered as a component of the Polish paradox, taking this historical backdrop into account.

4. Conclusion

Poland's national identity, founded on Catholicism, has a traditional character dating back to Poland's founding. Therefore, Catholicism has worked seamlessly in Poland to save society from disintegrating within old paradigms. However, Catholicism has been unable to prevent the modernization brought about by new paradigms and the establishment of the modern state from remaining on the brink. Consequently, Poland's religious cultural position, steeped in Western values, failed to integrate with the modernization that followed industrialization, resulting in its being pushed Eastward. These developments are also significant in that they reveal the root causes of Polish society's current problems. It is necessary to acknowledge that the causes of social developments stem from past developments. This situation highlights the importance of revealing the "Polish paradox" within the context of the social context and background. As a continuation of this theme, there is a need to focus on complementary approaches that focus on Poland's successive experiences with fascism, communism, and capitalism.

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